Introduction

Gender and race stereotypes are often seen within sports; however, are they actually affecting whether an individual can participate in that sport? Gender divides sports into categories of men’s sports and women’s sports. Therefore, both men and women possess certain restrictions from participating in gendered athletics. Race also, theoretically, divides sports into racially dominant activities. Some races are preferred more than others and are often seen in certain athletics. Studies have shown that those athletes have been restricted since they were young. The reason why those athletes are placed into certain categories are because of those stereotypes, resulting in the creation of certain constraints on sport participation.

Background

Sports participation by youth and teenagers is thought to be influential in developing a future. Especially when it comes to dealing with youth of minorities, such as African Americans, society automatically assumes that they’re not to be sponsored. However this stereotype only applies to males. Females are looked at as the ones who cheer them on or do the less aggressive sports, such as swimming and cheerleading. It is important to understand the definition and differences of words we use in our everyday language:

- **Gender**: the social meanings attached to one’s physical body that includes traits, sense of self as male/female/both/neither
- **Race**: a population of people who are believed to be naturally or biologically distinct from other populations
- **Racial stereotypes**: generalizations used to define all individuals who are classified in a particular racial category

Research Question and Methods

In what ways do gender and race stereotypes affect adolescents in sports?

Gender and race stereotypes are often seen in sports participation. In addition, gender also plays an essential role among these adolescents for deciding which sport to partake in. Men have more liberty for deciding which sport to partake in than women, who are not seen as “aggressive” enough to play “manly” sports. Therefore, the environment in which they are nurtured possesses a large influence in what sports they decide to play. The environment consists of role models, parents, peers, and the resources that are available for them. The results of this experiment should widen the perspective of our society. Since society as a whole traps races and genders within certain cages all under one prison, the prison itself represents sport participation and other systems that constrain certain races and genders. These individuals who are categorized, even children, are within those cages and are not able to be free because of certain factors, such as individuality/psychology, lack of knowledge, lack of interest, lack of partners, facilities/services, and accessibility/financial. These factors depend on the environment in which these adolescents are placed in at birth and the categories that are decided genetically: race and gender. Overall, athletes who are part of the NCAA feel indifferent towards the stereotypes found in their sport. They are aware of the racial comments said, but instead of affecting them in a negative way they use this as an inspiration to do better and prove those comments wrong. Others choose to brush the comments off because, as almost all of them stated, everyone is seen as equal on the team, white or black or any race. They are coming together for a purpose, to play and win through teamwork. As one of the survey participants stated, “one of the common stereotypes among the basketball community would be that the only reason black people like to play the sport is because it requires shooting, stealing, and running, which is unfair to say the least because all ethnic groups commit crime and if you probably only hear about the same ethnic group committing a crime, then there’s the media to blame: because you only hear and see what they want you to.”

In our survey from the children at Junior High School 194, we found that children who were Hispanic/Latino did not possess as many limitations as the other students, however, the majority did not play for teams, only for leisure. The children who were Asian did not enjoy playing or even watching a sport. Their parents restricted them from participating due to their belief that “physical abilities do not guarantee success as much as intelligence,” as one of the students stated. The children who were Black enjoyed playing football and basketball and believed that they can achieve future success within the sport. As we further identified the reason why they believe so, we realized that their academic grades weren’t as high as the other students. White children who were interviewed did not possess as much restriction as the opposing racially categorized students. However, they did not see themselves becoming successful in sports such as basketball because of racial stereotypes like “…I’m not as fast as the black kids”, in the words of one of the students. The girls, on the other hand, felt restricted from any sports that were perceived as “manly”, such as football.

From the surveys, we confirmed expectation on race and gender play a role in what sports teenagers decide to be part of. However, it didn’t directly affect them as much as we thought it would. All of the people we interviewed were aware of the stereotypes that surround them in sports communities, such as black/white people being good at basketball or that swimming is for white people. Aniel, 19, said “I feel that some of my teammates expected me to be hood or gangster when I first came on the team because I am Jamaican and was raised in the Bronx.” Another student said, “The stereotypes that exist within the sport don’t really affect me because at the end of they day, it’s just ignorance and ignorance is something that will always be around. But it should be noted that no matter one’s race or gender, the expectations of how it might affect someone shouldn’t get to one’s mind because we all have the ability to perform well regarding culture or gender differences.” This same idea was used by an 18-year-old female basketball player, April, who stated, “for me, my height has always been my issue, but no coach will ever tell me that. I have the skills to play, regardless of my height.” Although these students play different sports, they all stated that a sport is a team effort that requires cooperation amongst each other as well as good communication in order to win.

Conclusions

Based on our findings from the children at Junior High School 194, each race/ethnicity possesses their own level of constraints for sports participation. In addition, gender also plays an essential role among these adolescents for deciding which sport to participate in. Men have more liberty for deciding which sport to partake in than women, who are not seen as “aggressive” enough to play “manly” sports. Therefore, the environment given implies that the environment in which they are nurtured possesses a large influence in what sports they decide to play. The environment consists of role models, parents, peers, and the resources that are available for them. The results of this experiment should widen the perspective of our society. Since society as a whole traps races and genders within certain cages all under one prison, the prison itself represents sport participation and other systems that constrain certain races and genders. These individuals who are categorized, even children, are within those cages and are not able to be free because of certain factors, such as individuality/psychology, lack of knowledge, lack of interest, lack of partners, facilities/services, and accessibility/financial. These factors depend on the environment in which these adolescents are placed in at birth and the categories that are decided genetically: race and gender.

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